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SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/06/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EUN](#) [GM](#)
SUBJECT: GERMAN CHANCELLERY CLAIMS RACE FOR EU COUNCIL
PRESIDENT AND HIGH REP STILL WIDE OPEN

REF: A. BERLIN 1339
[1](#)B. FRANKFURT 2808

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR GEORGE GLASS. REASONS: 1.4
(B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Chancellery EU Affairs Director Dirk Loelke told us November 6 that notwithstanding European press reports touting Belgian PM Rompuy and UK FM Miliband as the clear favorites to become the first European Council President and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs under the Lisbon Treaty, the race remains wide open. He would not even confirm press reporting that there has been a general agreement on choosing a conservative from a "small member state" as President and a socialist from a "big member state" as High Rep. He claimed that everything was still in flux and that there was still potential for a "surprise decision."

[1](#)2. (C) The only thing he could definitively rule out at this point was that either position would be occupied by a German. Loelke noted that no one is seeking a German to fill these positions, and there also are no obvious German candidates or Germans seeking these jobs. While former FM Steinmeier had been rumored early on as a possible High Rep candidate, Chancellor Merkel effectively ended that speculation in late October by nominating Baden-Wuerttemberg Minister President Guenther Oettinger as the next EU Commissioner from Germany (ref B). Since the country providing the EU High Rep (who will also be Commission Vice President) will not have a separate Commissioner, picking Steinmeier would mean having to pull back the nomination of Oettinger. As an opposition leader, Steinmeier's candidacy was already a long shot, but now it can be safely ruled out.

[1](#)3. (C) There has also been press speculation that EU leaders, most of whom are coming to Berlin on November 9 for the 20th anniversary celebration of the fall of the Berlin Wall, might use the opportunity to meet on this issue. Loelke said the commemoration schedule was so jam-packed with events that even if the leaders wanted to meet as a group, they would have trouble finding the time to do so. The Swedish EU presidency would probably want to avoid having such meeting in Berlin in any event, for fear of ceding control over the process, preferring Stockholm or Brussels instead. In any case, no formal meeting in Berlin is scheduled, but Loelke acknowledged that the issue would almost certainly be discussed informally by EU leaders on the margins of the celebration.

[1](#)4. (C) Also contrary to press reports, Loelke said that the Swedish EU Presidency has, in fact, not yet officially called for a extraordinary summit on November 12 to make the political decision on the new leadership positions. He thought the Swedes would be reluctant to set a date for the summit until they were sure they had a consensus or near-consensus on the positions. They would want to avoid a repeat of the 2003 debacle over choosing the new president of

the European Central Bank. In any event, the formal decision on the positions can only come after the Lisbon Treaty has entered force, which will be December 1 -- assuming the Czechs stick to their commitment to deposit their instrument of ratification next week, or at the very least, do not delay past the end of the month.

MURPHY